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# Theology of the Old Testament: testimony, dispute, advocacy

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common ground in creative imagination going on between narrative history and narrative fiction and between historical memory and contemporary envisioning than one initially suspects. As an added bonus and addendum to all the foregoing, Perdue closes out each chapter by illustrating how such shifts play out in the Book of Jeremiah. In short, this is a promising book for catching up on recent study and reflection in OT theology.

Perdue finishes up his book with a proposal for doing OT theology in the future. He makes it clear that by his reference to the collapse of history he does not mean to suggest that history or historical method is no longer significant for OT scholarship. Rather his purpose has been to document the growing revolt against the domination of history on behalf of the potential of non-historical epistemologies. Perdue holds that both the descriptive and the constructive task must continue, but in imaginative dialogue and interchange with both past and present.

Only the harsh critique of time, I would suggest, will reveal whether such new OT theologizing will work to the interest of the OT, and not go on to become too distant, too subjective, and too imaginative, with the sad result that contemporary interests, not history, may end up dominating the text.

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## **Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy**

Walter Brueggemann  
Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997  
xxi + 777 pp. \$69.75 Hardcover

Commencing with winter semester 1998, the OT theology class at LTS was privileged to begin use of this book as its main textbook. Student response to the book has been most positive. One student quipped: "If you know of any other OT books like this one, I want to read them!" The Senior class agreed in its discussion of the book, that although excessive in length, it was challenging, informative, easy to read and comprehend.

Brueggemann's book is an OT theology generated out of imaginative interaction with the text of the Hebrew Bible. Its overall approach is post-modern. Thus Brueggemann allows only the OT text to speak, not anything outside, under, or behind the text. What the text or Israel speaks is what is, not what we or others think really happened or should have happened. Brueggemann refuses to let objective positivism or anything else dictate what is possible or impossible. What is more, Brueggemann lets the text speak for itself in all of its fullness, plurality, and diversity.

The introduction, where Brueggemann details the pre-postmodern and postmodern interpretive situations, and the epilogue, "Prospects for Theological Interpretation", are in themselves worth the price of the book, which is hefty. In between these two bookends Brueggemann lays out the heart of his book, the content and thrust of the OT, in terms of a trial, somewhat in imitation of Deutero-Isaiah's own efforts to win Israel back to YHWH's comforting side from exilic despair as a people.

In Part I Brueggemann sets forth Israel's "core testimony" in terms of vital Hebrew verbs (YHWH, the God who creates, makes promises, delivers, commands, and leads), adjectives (Exodus 34:6-7), and nouns (metaphors of governance and sustenance). By contrast, Part II supplies Israel's "countertestimony", citing counterevidence of YHWH's own hiddenness, ambiguity, and negativity. Next, Part III deals with Israel's "unsolicited testimony", a kind of testimony sometimes unintended, volunteered, or simply to be discovered in between the lines of fine print (regarding YHWH's partnerships with and beyond Israel, including generic humanity, the nations of the world, and creation itself). The final segment, Part IV, treats of Israel's "embodied testimony", i.e., YHWH's unmediated (public theophany, personal encounters) and mediated (through Torah, king, prophet, cult, and sage) presence.

The court-room model works surprisingly well to gather together the word of and witness to YHWH within the pages of the OT by comparison with the many organizing themes attempted in the past. If there is a problem with this model, it may lie more with us moderns than with the ancients, as we may not so easily link together truth and witness, after observing the O.J. Simpson trial and recent US presidential testimonies and countertestimonies. As to the subparts, one wonders how one arrives so confidently at the lines of demarcation between what is core, contra, unsolicited, and embodied. Where is such wisdom to be found? Does such confidence proceed from the time and place of one modern interpreter or a disparate group of ancient theologians? And with what justification does one confine such witness only to the name YHWH and not to other divine names used of Israel's God in the OT?

Persons who borrow or buy, read and reflect on this book, will not be disappointed. The only negatives raised against the book by the OT class were its expense, its length, and its repetitiveness. Treating the OT's core witness in terms of verbs, then adjectives, and nouns unfortunately invites some revisiting of the same material in more than one way or place. The class welcomed both the indices of scholars cited and of scriptural references, but lamented the absence of any subject or topic index, which would have, of course, added to the length. This means that a good page once read may not easily be found again.

W. Brueggemann admits he has written this OT theology as a Christian. Nevertheless he is insistent that OT theology as a Christian enterprise, must recognize Jewish imaginative construals of the OT text as legitimate theological activity, activity to which Christians might well pay more attention. Indeed, in Brueggemann's view, the task of OT theology as a Christian discipline, is "to articulate, explicate, mobilize, and make accessible

and available the testimony of the Old Testament in all of its polyphonic, elusive, imaginative power and to offer it to the church for its continuing work of construal toward Jesus."

In spite of some of the suspicion surrounding the postmodern perspective I personally believe this perspective provides an opportunity to the church. In a day when the witness of secular society and the university is being called on the carpet for its own over-confident objectivism, the church and synagogue can increasingly make its own testimony about the God of Israel and our Lord Jesus Christ in equal and new-found legitimacy. I believe this book is one such testimony.

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### **Eyewitness to Jesus**

C.P. Thiede and M. D'Ancona  
New York: Doubleday, 1996

Basically this book is the account of the reasoning and path followed by Dr. C.P. Thiede, an eminent papyrologist, in re-dating the Magdalen Papyrus, as recorded by his amanuensis, M. D'Ancona, the Deputy Editor of *The Sunday Telegraph*. Putting aside the breathless and rather precious prose of the dust jacket, it really is a fascinating volume to read. In addition to reporting the line of argument developed by Dr. Thiede, Mr. D'Ancona, who is himself a graduate of Magdalen, records a brief biography of Rev. C.B. Huleatt who acquired the manuscript fragments while serving in Luxor, Egypt, and donated them to Magdalen College at the turn of the twentieth century. Rev. Huleatt was also a graduate of the College, and thought of himself as a "Magdalen man".

Dr. Thiede's contention is that the fragments contain elements from Matthew 26:7-8, 10, 14-15, 22-23, 31-33, that the fragments came from a complete codex of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and that the codex pre-dates the end of the Jewish revolt against the Romans, which occurred in the late sixties and early seventies of the first century A.D. The arguments are detailed, filled with examples taken from other investigations in papyrology, and replete with esoterica such as line length analysis, the use of "nomina sacra", editorial techniques used in marking "new lines" or "new paragraphs", the development of microscopes and microscopic analysis methods in order to reconstruct debatable characters, and so on. Further, the story of Charles Bousfield Huleatt is interwoven through the text. Unfortunately, this rather mixed method of presentation gives the lay reader much trouble in following the thread of the argument. To the expert in the field it is no doubt obvious that the work of O'Callaghan on 7Q5 is being used as an